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## TEACHING TOLERANCE AT SCHOOL: THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERN FRENCH EDUCATION SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** *The fostering tolerance problem in the modern world is becoming increasingly current in the context of globalization processes and the migration crisis. Following the need to cultivate tolerance in the younger generation, French modern education system aims to install the 'values of the Republic' as an element of public school programs. At the same time it turned out that most teachers are not sufficiently trained to carry out educational activities in the sphere of fostering tolerance. The education system reform carried out in 2013 made this training compulsory introducing the so-called 'Common Core Program' (Tronc Commun) to future teachers of all specialties. Within the program teachers deepen their knowledge in history, philosophy, law, sociology, pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** *Tolerance; Teacher Training; Education; Values; France*

## INTRODUCTION

With the rapid transformation of the education system and its adaptation to modern requirements of society, the problem of teacher preparation for professional activity is becoming more and more important. In connection with the future multifunctional activity, participation in the development of education, science, production, spiritual life of society, the problem of qualitative preparation of higher pedagogical educational establishments' graduates is of particularly important. Further improvement requires not only the formation of the professional qualities of future teachers, but also the education to promote national and universal values, active citizenship, pluralism and democracy.

According to French researcher Guy Lheureux, in a modern society focused on the endless consumption of material goods, individualism, the growing influence of social media, the teacher himself should be a guide who leads their students to the people values such as generosity, sympathy, peacefulness. The task of school and education is to maximize the socialization of those 'little people' whose purpose is to live in society (Lheureux 2012, 228).

The role and authority of the teacher is characterized not only by the knowledge he imparts to his students, but also by his personal influence on each individual and a group he is responsible for. Teachers' leading skills comprise the ability to build relationships, organize team work, organize a democratic debate, where everyone can express themselves freely, without implying it to others, instill confidence, and teach to respect each other and to be a good listener.

## TOLERANCE AS A VALUE TOUGHT AT SCHOOL

During 2011-2012, 120 French school teachers were interviewed to find out what moral values could help reduce school violence. In this regard, the French teachers attributed respect, kindness and tolerance to the three most important values (Lheureux 2012, 156).

Summarizing the scientific and pedagogical sources indicates that the most complete and accurate definition of the term 'tolerance' is presented in the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance of November 16, 1995. This principle is interpreted as "respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human" (Art. 1.1). Art. 4 of the same Declaration emphasize the importance of proper organization of the education process to prevent intolerance. In particular, the text of the Declaration states: "Education policies and programmes should contribute to development of understanding, solidarity and tolerance among individuals as well as among ethnic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic groups and nations" (UNESCO 1995). Today France, as a country with a diverse population of ethnicities, cultures, and religious beliefs, due to immigration processes since the mid-twentieth century, has accumulated considerable experience in fostering tolerance in schoolchildren.

Public school education programs, in addition to special subjects, also include a 'common foundation (core) of knowledge, skills and culture' - a set of knowledge, skills, values and behaviors necessary for the successful learning and life of the student as an individual and as a future citizen, aged from 6 to 16. According to the Decree of the Ministry of National Education No. 2015-372 of 31.03.2015, the Common Core "provides an open universal education that is shared by all and based on values that allow people to live in a tolerant, free society" (Ministère de l'éducation nationale et de la jeunesse 2015).

The analysis of the Common Core program content, revealed that its components include the cultivation of tolerance: the student works in a team, shares tasks, participates in constructive dialogue, takes different points of view, while defending his views, demonstrating diplomatic abilities, ability to speak and seek consensus; develops the ability to express their feelings and thoughts, respect others, express their feelings and emotions using accurate words; learns to resolve conflicts without aggression, to avoid violence through the ability of accurate expression of own thoughts, communication and reasoning; respect the opinions and freedom of others, refuse any form of intimidation or subjugation; learns to cast aside prejudices and stereotypes, nurtures the ability to value and live with people who differ; is able to show compassion (empathy) and kindness; studies the peculiarities of the organization and functioning of societies, gets acquainted with the diversity of human experience and its forms (scientific and technical discoveries, different cultures, systems of thinking and belief, works of art, representations through which people try to understand the human condition and the world in which they live). Thus, the student "identifies the major problems and challenges of human development and is able to understand the causes and consequences of inequality, the source of conflicts and solidarity" (Ministère de l'éducation nationale et de la jeunesse 2015).

## COMPONENTS OF TEACHING TOLERANCE AT SCHOOL

### *Moral and civic education*

The main purpose of civic and moral education of schoolchildren in France is to cultivate the following values of the French Republic, "freedom, equality, brotherhood, secularity (French *laïcité*), solidarity, and a spirit of justice, respect and the absence of any form of discrimination" (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche 2015). In the program of moral and civic education it is explained that "the values of the Republic are connected, first of all, with the humanistic values that determine its civilizational character, such as ethics of truth, requirements of reason, public good, spirit of law, tolerance and desire for peace" (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche 2015).

As a result of the terrorist attacks in France in January 2015, the Ministry of Education has declared 'the mobilization of the school on the values of the Republic', which covers the entire educational cycle from pre-school education to the graduating class of the lyceum. Moral and civic education, including the cultivation of values such as tolerance, is taught a separate discipline in elementary and secondary school and becomes a kind of 'pedagogical lever' designed to improve the 'peaceful coexistence' that has recently come under the threat (Gérard Pithon 2017). Meanwhile, teachers remain unprepared for disputing issues with students who may not share the values being promoted. Many issues are also to discuss regarding the practical implementation of the methods and forms of such education.

In French secondary school, the subject of 'moral and civic education' is usually taught by a teacher of history and geography. In college, such a lesson has usually a form of lecture where the teacher talks about the rules of the home, the rights and responsibilities of students, various institutions, and more. In the lyceum the subject is mostly devoted to discussion (discussion of news, morality or class life), using press materials, pedagogical projects (excursions, charitable assistance, etc.), documentary research and presentations. At the same time, moral and civic education remains almost the only compulsory subject of the curriculum for which future teachers are not specifically trained.

### *Secularism*

It is important to note that secularism in France is an integral part of civic education. According to French scholars, secularity as a universal value and principle of the education system contributes to the cultivation of tolerance in the younger generation, because it unites all people, regardless of the culture, religion and political views (Jean-Louis Bianco 2018; Beaubourg 2004, 234). In the education system of the French Republic, secularity is seen as the freedom of conscience, which is both freedom of religion and freedom of atheism. This principle, enshrined in the law of 1905 on the separation of the church from the state, is intended to protect school students from ideological, economic and religious proselytism. The concept of secularism has evolved since the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was equal to the principle of neutrality of state 'secular' schools, which guaranteed the separation of the state (in particular, the public school) from religious dogmas (Christian, Muslim and any other). Today, secularism has become a universal value and largely determines the direction of moral and civic education in school. It becomes more rational than simple neutrality of education, and aims to educate children for democracy within the walls of a tolerant school, where the upbringing of multiculturalism is filled with genuine respectful moral values (respect for dignity, respect for ethnic differences, respect between adults and children; respect between teachers and students; tolerance of children who learn less quickly or who have learning difficulties; secularity based on debate and discussion when the teacher encourages an exchange of ideas or discussion, for example during conflict

between two students in the class, etc.) (Lheureux 2013, 143). At the same time, a survey of teachers conducted by the National Secular Committee found that 74% of teachers had no training in secular teaching at school (Comité National d'Action Laïque 2018).

French education researchers (Beitone 2015; Fath 1991; Berton 2007) insist on the need to make secularism a compulsory component of future teacher training, only few, like teachers in economics and social sciences, history, geography and philosophy, have sufficient epistemological training to avoid both scientific arrogance and relativistic limitation, considering with the students questions of secularity. At the same time, it is important for teachers not to understand secularism as an imposition of values or as a punishment for failure to comply with certain norms, so secularity may prove to be the opposite of tolerance, as is the case with the prohibition of wearing religious clothing and hats in French schools (George 2003).

### *Religious Studies*

The cultivation of tolerance is one of the major tasks of religious studies taught in the French school in disciplines such as history, literature and philosophy. Teachers testify to the difficulties in teaching French, history, philosophy, and fine arts, while today their students do not have sufficient vocabulary or formed concepts important for understanding religious issues. This emphasizes once again the importance of an education that would allow young people of different backgrounds and cultures to get to know each other better, to accept each other, to communicate with each other. In general, the issues of enriching the general culture and developing tolerance are closely linked to the social expectations of different actors in the education system. As Jacques George notes, "Religious studies are not only a history of religions that is already included in history programs, but also a look at the present" (George 2003). Teaching future educators the basics of religious studies, in particular using an interdisciplinary approach, through history, philosophy, literature, art, aims to allow each future teacher at the stage of learning to improve the preparation of teaching their own discipline through comparison and adaptation, to realize different approaches to teaching their subject are complementary, and possibly to open up to cultural facts, even far from their university program (Berton 2007, 129).

### *Multicultural Component*

It is also useful to note that the multicultural component is perhaps the most important element in preparing future teachers for fostering tolerance. For example, since the early 1970s, the term 'intercultural education' has been used in French pedagogical science to mean "a set of actions which a single teacher or, more generally, a school, uses to establish relationships that are based on positive interaction and understanding between students of

different cultures" (Kerzil 2002, 122). Thus, intercultural education enables every child, the bearer of various cultural references, to absorb the knowledge and cultural codes of the society which he or she lives in. Therefore, the main task of intercultural education is to open the eyes of the child and the youth to the world around them, to teach them to be inquisitive and tolerant of diversity, to be able to interact with others, as well as to manage conflicts and negotiate. The rapid development of multiculturalism and multilingualism in societies, including the countries of the European Union, has made teacher training for multicultural classes a priority.

## THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHER TRAINING IN FRANCE

The need to prepare teachers for fostering tolerance in students has led to a significant transformation of the higher education system. Since 2013, the Training of Teachers and other Educators in France has been undertaken by the Higher Education Teacher Training Courses (fr. *École Supérieure du Professorat et de L'éducation* - ESPE). To create a pedagogical culture common to all, without exception, educators, into a two-year training program in the professions in the field of upbringing, education and training (fr. *Métiers de l'enseignement, de l'éducation et de la formation* - MEEF) in addition to special disciplines, a basic general program (fr. *Tronc Commun*) was introduced covering all four semesters of master's studies (Legifrance.gouv.fr 2013). The structure of this basic general training program is based on four major thematic complexes, one of which is called 'Republican values and the ethical and institutional character of the profession', which embodies the concept of secularism, the fight against discrimination, the culture of gender equality between men and women. Understanding the values that underlie tolerance, the ability to impart them to students within a classroom or educational setting are subject to a special survey in the context of oral qualification exams. The ESPE executives are offered the following topics for the basic general program:

- History: study of religious facts, history of education;
- Philosophy: citizenship, secularism, critical thinking, rights and responsibilities, ethics and responsibility;
- Law: rights and responsibilities, ethics and responsibility, knowledge of law, security;
- Sociology: the place of the school in society and its tasks, education policy, democratization, inequality of education performance and social background, relationships with families;
- Psychology: psycho-effective development of the child and the teenager; building authority and trust; prevention of certain behaviors, discrimination, problem of otherness (differences) (Syndicat national de l'enseignement supérieur 2015).



In the 2016-2017 academic year, the following courses were included in the general curriculum for the preparation of future teachers of the 1st (elementary school) and the 2nd (secondary school) levels at the Paris High School for Teaching Personnel of Paris: "Teaching Secularity and Religious Studies, Theoretical and Practical Aspects", "Secularism at Schools", "History of Arts and Teaching of Religious Studies", "Education of Citizenship", "Work with Students' Families", "Combat Discrimination at School and its Prevention", "Secularism and Religious Studies", "Secularism and Republican School: Key Issues and Challenges", "New Moral and Civic Education Program", "Organizing Philosophical Clubs at School", "Combating School Violence", "Educating Media and Information Literacy in the Context of Citizenship" and others (Ecole supérieure du professorat et de l'éducation. Académie de Paris 2016). Such training, which combines the theoretical and practical aspects of fostering tolerance, is very often interactive, opening the space for questions and discussions based on the knowledge gained, as well as considering the problems of their practical application in dealing with complex and important issues in the educational work with students.

## CONCLUSION

Tolerance is a moral value that should be taught to students. The introduction into the school program of a 'common core of knowledge, skills and culture' aimed at educating a person able to live in a free, tolerant society, necessitates appropriate training for future teachers who can promote tolerance in students. Preparing future teachers to teach tolerance is an urgent need of the French teacher education system.

So, basic curriculum that is compulsory for all future teachers was introduced in the higher education teacher training program. Components of this program, such as moral and civic education, religious studies, secularism, intercultural education, are directly connected with the promotion of tolerance and contribute to the knowledge and practical skills required for the teacher to work effectively with students. As the problem is getting more and more urgent for most European countries facing intolerance, aggression, xenophobia, increased attention to training future teachers to foster tolerance in schoolchildren should help reduce the negative effects in society. Developing the training of future teachers to cultivate tolerance is at the same time important for the development of competencies such as emotional intelligence and the fight against bullying at school.

The theory and practice of pedagogical education in France has accumulated considerable experience in training a future teacher to cultivate tolerance among schoolchildren in accordance with the value priorities of French society. In our opinion, the inclusion of elements of tolerance cultivation in the academic curriculum of teachers of particular disciplines (foreign languages, literature, philosophy, history, geography, physical education, etc.) through the use of an interdisciplinary approach will contribute to the effectiveness of training to teach tolerance; enhancing the role of pedagogical practice in



preparing teachers for educational activities; training teachers to work in a multicultural classroom to teach immigrant children, including preparation for bilingual learning; involvement of future teachers in extracurricular activities (hobby classes, discussion clubs, volunteer activities).



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